**BACK TO BASICKS**

**BY DAVE BARRY**

*This Dave Barry column was originally published Sept. 4, 1994*

Gather 'round, young people, because it's back-to-school time, and Uncle Dave wants to give you some important advice to help you excel in the classroom and have successful, rewarding careers, assuming that the Earth is not destroyed by giant comet chunks.

This is definitely a possibility. Just recently, giant comet chunks whomped into Jupiter and caused destruction so massive that it would have wiped out all human life if there had been any, which there probably wasn't because the atmosphere on Jupiter has essentially the same chemical composition as Drano.

Of course the astronomy community carried on as though the mass destruction on Jupiter was just about the coolest scientific thing to happen since the invention of the pocket protector. Every night you'd see astronomers on the TV news, holding up blurred photographs of what appeared to be a pizza, pointing to a roundish smudge that appeared to be a pepperoni, and announcing, in happy voices, that it was the equivalent of 19 hillion jillion atomic bombs.

They claim we don't have to worry. They claim that the mathematical odds of a large comet chunk hitting the Earth in our lifetimes are infinitesimal, even smaller -- if such a thing is possible -- than the odds of the Buffalo Bills winning a Super Bowl. But whenever we hear the astronomy community making claims, two words should spring into our minds: "Comet Kohoutek."

Back in 1973, the astronomy community claimed that Comet Kohoutek was going to pass close to the Earth and produce this spectacular celestial phenomenon, so big and bright you'd be able to see it even in the daytime. People were afraid to go outside for fear they would suffer comet burns.

And what happened? Nothing. All over the world, millions of people spent hours squinting at the sky, pointing excitedly at airplanes, moths, beer signs, smudges on their binocular lenses, etc. But ultimately they had to accept the ugly truth: There was no Comet Kohoutek. Oh, sure, the astronomy community, desperate to save face, produced some blurred photographs of a "comet, " but it turned out, upon close inspection, to be a human sperm cell magnified 400,000 times. (We now believe that it belonged to Carl Sagan.)

My point is that if the astronomy community claims that we're not going to get hit by giant comet chunks, then we probably are. The result would be mass destruction on the most horrendous scale ever seen in the history of this planet, causing famine, disease, death and -- in the United States alone -- literally millions of personal-injury lawsuits. This would lead to a major boom in the legal profession, a career field that Uncle Dave feels you young people should definitely be considering as you head back to school. Even in the unlikely event that the Earth is NOT hit by giant comet chunks, experts believe that the legal field will continue to grow rapidly, as more and more Americans realize the practical benefits of suing everybody about everything, including dandruff. This column alone will generate hundreds of new jobs in the legal field as a result of lawsuits filed by representatives of Drano, the Buffalo Bills, the Kohoutek family and Carl Sagan.

So the economic future looks bright, young people. But no matter what career field you ultimately choose to enter, you're not going to get very far if you have a stupid haircut. Uncle Dave is especially concerned about a hairstyle that is showing up more and more often on young males: It's the one where the sides and back of the head are shaved completely naked, while the hair on top is grown really long and pulled straight back into a ponytail.

Young people, this haircut looks even stupider than the one where you shave words into the side of your head. This haircut doesn't even look like it's an organic part of your body. It looks like a small, wet, dead raccoon perched on top of a bald head. You young people cannot seriously expect to get a high- paying, long-term-growth-potential job, such as business magnate or member of the O.J. Simpson defense complex, if you go around looking like Davy Crockett with a scalp disorder.

Of course you probably don't even know who Davy Crockett was. It is indeed a sad commentary on our state of educational preparedness when so many young people do not recognize the name of the author of our constitution. That is why, as we begin the school year, Uncle Dave is urging you to knuckle down and work hard in all your classes unless they're difficult or involve anything clearly useless such as the "cosine." You must prepare yourselves, young people, because Uncle Dave's generation is getting old. We are almost ready to go to the retirement home to spend the rest of our days tapping our bedpans rhythmically in time to "easy listening" rock 'n' roll. We must pass the torch on to you, and you must grasp it, ideally by the end that is not on fire.